

Rhode Island Litter Task Force

Minutes for August 21, 2003 Meeting

August Recorder: Lynn Ruggeri

Present: Geoffrey DiCenso (RIACC) Terri Bisson (DEM), Barry Schiller (Sierra Club), Eugenia Marks (ASRI), Allen Bridgman (ASRI), Lynn Ruggeri (RIACC),

The meeting was called to order: 3:10 PM

1. The participants discussed the organization and working plan for the task force. Geoff agreed to chair the task force and to continue to write and distribute the agendas. He will send the agenda out one week before the meetings convene to allow for additions by task force members. The Chair will distribute the revised agenda at the meeting. Each month a member of the task force will record the minutes on a rotating basis. The task force members will receive the recorded minutes via email one week before the next meeting for review. Lynn Ruggeri volunteered to take the minutes for August and a sign up sheet was circulated for a recorder for the next several meetings.

2. Eugenia Marks raised the question of defining the over all goal for the task force. After some discussion, the following was formulated:

Overall Goal: To Reduce State Litter Problem

Primary means to achieve that goal:

A. Revise the law concerning the restricted receipts account

B. Revise the litter and recycling laws

The rationale for the A. (above) would be to obtain monies that could be earmarked for litter control, particularly clean-up efforts.

Before undertaking the above means, it was decided that first the task force must finalize and administer the law enforcement survey. Information gathered from this survey will help to determine the types of changes needed in the laws and demonstrate the need for these changes. It was further agreed that this information will be important when members of the task force approach the legislators and governor for suggested changes to the laws.

C. Revisiting the Bottle Bill: The possibility of changing the law for only glass returns was discussed. Terri will provide the names of the people who will be proposing the latest 2004 initiative on this bill for our next meeting.

It was determined that in the past, the major argument for opposing a bottle bill had been that the receipts for the beverage case charge were already "effectively" handling the litter problem. However, those monies are no longer restricted for litter control and have been instead going into the general fund since 1996, therefore, this argument is no longer valid. Additionally, the current law states that if a bottle bill is passed then the state would no longer be able to collect the beverage case charges, which presently go into the general fund. Furthermore, The Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation

profits by the money from aluminum and plastic currently being recycled (which would be minimized with a bottle bill) and these monies are currently being used to help fund recycling efforts.

It was further agreed that proposing a bottle bill could lead to some change in the restricted receipt account laws so that some of these monies could be ear-marked for litter control. Possible sources for these monies could be an increase in beverage fees, new taxes on fast-food beverage cups (cradle to grave responsibility of these throw away items), increase in fees for yearly business license renewals, and corporate donations. Lynn also mentioned the idea of putting into place some type of an incentive program for businesses who promote litter control and recycling as they sell their products, perhaps making them exempt from new fees or giving them a reduced fee if they demonstrate success in their efforts to reduce litter and increase recycling. In a related litter control initiative, she mentioned the idea for the state to develop an incentive program whereby 10 used lottery tickets could be redeemed for 1 free ticket. She mentioned that discarded tickets are a substantial source of litter near stores with lottery sales.

D. Increase Litter Control Awareness: Several ideas were proposed. Lynn again mentioned the idea of putting a signature space on mailed registration renewals forms from the DMV to indicate that the signee was aware that littering is a crime and that the driver is responsible for passengers littering. At the very least, the DMV offices would be a good target for educational posters etc. on roadside trash and environmental impact since there is always a “captive audience.”

Lynn gave details of the “Don’t Mess With Texas Program” (Keep Texas Beautiful; Gotcha Ticket Program) and their successes which include: \$1 to \$11 cost-benefit ratio for all of their litter control efforts; extensive education programs for law enforcement officers as a result of their enforcement survey; and required litter control education component given during all defensive driver and driver education courses. Their main target group is 16-24 year olds who, according to their research, litter the most. They found that the fine for litter must be “substantial” to the offender to have any impact on future littering behavior (80% reduction). Community service also decreased future litter by 80%. A warning or small fine had little or no impact on future behavior.

Lynn will be obtaining some more specifics on their program by mail from Cecile Carson of the Keep Texas Beautiful Program, particularly as it refer to littering as a crime and the “broken windows theory.” Once Lynn receives this, she will finalize a short summary of this information for the task force’s review. The purpose of this summary would be to show the connection between litter, physical disorder and crime rates to law enforcement and municipal officials. Cecile suggested contacting Becky Lyons of Keep America Beautiful (located in Stamford CT) to see if she could help with the task force’s efforts. Terri suggested that we contact Becky Lyons about the cost-benefit ratio of other states and Barry asked if we could find out where the other states get their program monies. Lynn volunteered to find out more from Becky Lyons. She will also contact the RI name listed on the Keep America Beautiful Web site.

3. Concerning the editing and the administration of the Law Enforcement Survey, the task force decided the following:

a. The form needs to be edited again to distinguish between “rubbish” versus “litter;” Geoff and Lynn will take a look at this and have an edited version prepared for the next meeting.

b. In addition to law enforcement officials, the survey should be sent out to all town/city officials to include the planner, council members and public works directors to get boarder input.

c. The survey will be distributed, via RIACC, to all conservation commission chairs to deliver to the above mentioned parties, with the task force members helping with known municipal contacts where possible.

d. Terri said that DEM should be able to assist with the stationary costs (to develop letterhead specifically for the Rhode Island Litter task Force) and possibly some of the mailing costs. She agreed to draft the cover letter for the survey. The task force members and their respective affiliations will also be listed on the letter.

e. The survey will be returned to this mailing address: RI Litter Task Force, Suite 330, 235 Promenade Ave, Providence, RI. This will go to Terri’s DEM office but the survey returns will be opened and processed by the task force. Eugenia offered the help of the Audubon Society of RI (ASRI) staff with the survey data and Allen of ASRI offered to assist in organizing and preparing the data summary.

4. The next meeting is scheduled for September 25th.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn T. Ruggeri